DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 066 CE 083 312

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TITLE Getting Results: Outcomes Management and the Annie E. Casey Foundations Jobs Initiative.
INSTITUTION Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE 2000-09-00
NOTE 22p.; This research brief is the second in a series of updates related to issues around retention and advancement for low-income residents and lessons learned from the Annie E. Casey Jobs Initiative.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.aecf.org/jobsinitiative/outcomes_management.pdf.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Employment Programs; Evaluation Methods; Institutional Cooperation; *Job Placement; *Job Training; Organizational Development; Outcomes of Education; Philanthropic Foundations; Program Administration; Program Design; Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Annie E Casey Foundation; Colorado (Denver); *Control of Outcomes; Louisiana (New Orleans); Missouri (Saint Louis); Pennsylvania (Philadelphia); Washington (Seattle); Wisconsin (Milwaukee)

ABSTRACT

The Anne E. Casey Foundation (AECF) funded replications of effective jobs projects to achieve better job placement and retention for low-income, young adults. The six projects funded, collectively called the Jobs Initiative (JI), in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Seattle, and St. Louis, used an outcomes framework developed by The Rensselaerville Institute (TRI), and produced the following results over a 5-year period: 4,500 job placements through 33 different jobs projects, including short-term job readiness and long-term skill training; 6-month retention rates in the labor market of 70 percent, and 1-year retention rates approaching the same percentage; starting wages between $7 and $11 per hour, with many including health benefits. The TRI outcome-based framework induced the following changes in AECF management of JI: shift toward thinking in terms of "investment" with a rate of return in terms of human gain; reduced focus on process and inputs; use of a "milestone funnel"; small-scale and rapid prototyping; project leaders who project energy, enthusiasm and entrepreneurship; and seeing success in terms of "results and learning" rather than in performance alone. During the course of the JI, the projects included creating clear statements of program goals and strategies, identification of partners and funding sources, projection of milestones, creation of budgets and financial plans, and revisions of targets and plans as the projects progressed. Although long-term evaluation results are not yet available, evidence to date suggests that the TRI outcomes framework significantly aided the six JI local investors in developing and implementing jobs projects and achieving encouraging employment results. (KC)

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ED 465 066

Getting Results: Outcomes Management

And the Annie E. Casey Foundations Jobs Initiative

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September 2000

This research brief is the second in a series of updates related to issues around retention and advancement for low-income residents and lessons learned from the Annie E. Casey Jobs Initiative.

The authors wish to express their gratitude to Laura Dresser at the Center on Wisconsin Strategy, Susan Gewirtz at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ed Hatcher at Burness Communications, Tom Rhodenbaugh at the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, Mary Jean Ryan at the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development, and Doug Welch at Abt Associates, for their useful and thoughtful comments in preparing this paper.

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Introduction

By the 1990s, evaluation studies had concluded that job training was not making a positive difference for low-income communities. Many employment programs treated certificates of completion as an appropriate short-term outcome, and 90 days on the job was regarded as long-term success. More broadly, government officials at all levels were being evaluated--not for creating bureaucratic processes--but for the results they produced for people. The reinvention movement sought to enhance government performance and results through techniques imported from the private sector, such as outsourcing, privatization, and enterprise development. It was becoming evident that narrow performance-based contracting, such as occurred under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), frequently stifled the innovation required to achieve better labor market results.

The workforce field, however, was not completely bereft of alternative models. Several outstanding jobs projects around the country--such as STRIVE in New York and Project QUEST in San Antonio--had attained impressive job-quality, wage, and retention results. These projects shared common design principles of engaging employers and communities and maintained an entrepreneurial focus on results. These projects evolved and persisted despite public systems that generally gave priority funding to more traditional employment and training programs.

This paper summarizes the efforts of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) to invest in the replication of effective jobs projects to achieve better job placement and retention for low-income, young adults. It is a story of how AECF and its six-city Jobs

Initiative came to use an explicit outcome framework in its efforts to reform workforce development systems.

Our discussion focuses on the outcome thinking methodology developed by The Rensselaerville Institute (TRI) and its use by the Jobs Initiative. It describes key elements of the Jobs Initiative (JI) and what led to the adoption of the TRI methodology in the six JI sites: Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Seattle, and St. Louis. It then examines how AECF and the six JI sites used the outcomes-framework for strategy development, project management, learning and course correction over a four-year period. We conclude by reflecting on our learnings in terms of what has worked what hasn't and our hopes and cautions for the future.

Before recounting AECF's adoption of an outcome approach, it is worth summarizing what the Jobs Initiative has produced to date. As of March 31, 2000, the six JI sites had produced 4,500 job placements through 33 different jobs projects, which included short-term job readiness and long-term skill training. Six-month retention rates in the labor market approached 70 percent, and one-year retention rates in several projects maintained this level of retention. Starting wages for participants ranged from $7.00 to $11.00 per hour, and many received health benefits for the first time. Participants placed in jobs were generally low-income, had received some form of public assistance in the past, and increased their working hours and wages through participating in the JI compared to previously held jobs.

Applying Outcome Thinking to the Jobs Initiative

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is a national children's foundation that in 1993 established a working group devoted to investing in income, opportunity, and work strategies for low-income, urban families. AECF designed what came to be called the Jobs Initiative (JI) by commissioning a national survey of best practices, convening a variety of workforce experts, and supporting R&D studies of specific industries and jobs strategies.

AECF designed the Jobs Initiative to build upon and expand what seemed to be most effective in the employment field. It was to be an eight-year, $30 million investment. It would start with strategic planning, implement short-term jobs projects that primarily served 18 to 35 year olds in target neighborhoods, and, finally, build upon these efforts to reform workforce systems and achieve large-scale employment impacts. The JI would support investment in multiple jobs projects to address different employment barriers and opportunities experienced in specific cities/regions. Because sites would have to manage a portfolio of jobs projects, the AECF's local grantee was conceived to be a "development intermediary" or local investor. Local investors were to be entrepreneurial, yet connected to the broader civic infrastructure as well as to grassroots community organizations in designated "impact communities" of 80,000 to 100,000 residents Mapping Social Interventions: The AECF Jobs Initiative.

A few months before the JI site selection was finalized, AECF had asked the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) to conduct a simulation exercise of JI strategic planning in order to identify potential design and implementation problems. The common theme articulated during the exercise was the need to clarify the JI vision

and to engage social entrepreneurs to increase flexibility for local investments. Someone suggested that AECF talk with The Rensselaerville Institute (TRI) about its outcome model.

What ensued was a five-year experiment in using the TRI outcome framework that continues today. TRI is a national non-profit community and organizational development group. Founded in 1963 and originally conceived as a center for scholars, statesmen and artists, TRI has redefined itself as a leader in results-focused community and organizational change. In 1991, TRI published the book *Outcome Funding: A New Approach to Targeted Grantmaking*, which was based on four years of implementation and encapsulates the organization's thinking about outcomes.

Reading *Outcome Funding* and participating in an introductory TRI workshop, JI designers grew convinced that a partnership with TRI made sense. AECF appreciated the fit between the JI design and the TRI outcome principles, which built upon JI designers commitment to an outcome focus, an investor-like process, and the need for a portfolio of jobs projects. In the TRI principles, JI designers found a set of implementation principles that could guide and discipline their investment. Among the core TRI principles that most strongly resonated with JI designers were:

- The disciplined use of a core lexicon of terms to change thinking and action. This begins with foundations shifting away from seeing themselves as grantmakers or funders to being **investors** who seek a rate of return in terms of human gain.
- The importance of understanding that developing an effective outcome orientation often means relaxing the focus on process and input management.

- Use of the "milestone funnel," which depicts the anticipated progress of customers (both job seekers and employers) from recruitment, through job placement and to 12-month retention.
- The need for a proactive orientation through small-scale and rapid prototyping to test assumptions and design principles.
- The belief that the individuals who lead and implement projects must be "spark plugs," who have energy, enthusiasm and an entrepreneurial orientation.
- The need to see success in the combination of "results and learning," as opposed to narrow accountability for performance alone.

These insights reinforced the assumptions of the JI design and rang true with the employment and training experience of the JI designers. Real workforce innovation was needed with a relentless focus on good jobs as the end result. Job-training efforts should no longer settle for certificates of completion or improved self-esteem.

The TRI Outcome Thinking Framework

Six concepts and associated terms are core to the TRI's outcome approach (see accompanying box). An *outcome* in the TRI system is defined as: *The ultimate and overarching end-state, which the investor strives towards through its investments. A compelling vision of success designed to motivate implementors to outstanding performance.* The JI's outcome statement called for "increasing the odds that inner-city young adults would get good jobs" as the driving purpose of its investment. What AECF meant by "good jobs" pushed the limits of employment training in the early 1990s--a minimum wage of 7.00/hour, health benefits, career mobility, and one-year labor market

retention. To achieve these outcomes the JI sites established targets--numbers of good jobs (with certain wages, benefits, career potential), high retention rates; and workforce system reforms.

OUTCOME TERMINOLOGY

Customers: The people who directly interact with an organization's services and implementors. This interaction is intended to result in a change in customer behavior, condition, and satisfaction in line with the stated outcome.

Performance Target: The number of customers and the types of changes in behavior, condition, or satisfaction an implementor seeks to achieve through a specific investment. Performance targets are always established at the start of a project.

Milestones: Those presumed critical points of achievement which customers must reach in their progressing toward the performance target. These are the *short-term results* of implementor activities.

Learning: A relatively enduring change in behavior generally coming about as the result of a missed milestone.

Verification: Establishing that something represented to happen, such as milestone or target accomplishment, did in fact take place.

Setting a Course With Outcomes Management

Along with its terminology, additional core features of TRI's outcomes approach also became clearer to AECF and soon helped it to manage an investor-oriented initiative:

- TRI demanded a change of language from grantmakers, from goals and objectives to the business concepts of investors, customers, outcomes, targets, and rate of return.
- Investor focused means being an active participant in achieving targets and outcomes. In the JI, there exists two levels of investors: the AECF is the national investor; and local sites, or development intermediaries, are the local investors of AECF resources as well as matching and leveraged dollars.
- Understanding the meaning of customer is fundamental to the TRI method. Although AECF's ultimate concern was how its investments could help low-income job seekers, its "customers" in the short-term were the six local investors. Because AECF's success depended on how well local investors designed and implemented jobs projects, the foundation had to consider how to increase their chances for success. It could not simply mandate success through performance contracts and a prescribed partnership model. Nor could it be disengaged by standing to the side and awaiting for results to come forth.
- One of the early ways that AECF helped its customer local investors was by making explicit its givens and assumptions. Using TRI's investor outline format, AECF clearly identified its "givens"--the non-negotiable items related to purpose, funding levels, and timeframe, and its assumptions about labor markets, employers, job seekers, effective jobs strategies, and local investors. Assumptions could be tested and refined; givens would stay in place. The emphasis on clarity and clear communication, which often required an investment of time and foundation resources, helped to improve inherently challenging relationships between the national and local investors.

Producing Strategies, Plans, and Targets

After AECF clarified its own *givens, assumptions, and outcome* statement for the JI, it developed an 18-month process for local investors to devise strategic investment plans. During this period, local investors built partnerships, commissioned studies about industry sectors, talked with potential job seekers, and tested potential strategies and projects. Project plans provided specific detail about how a generalized employment strategy would be translated into concrete action and customer results. Plans included these elements:

- a clear definition of job placement, wage, and retention targets for each project;
- a description of employer and job seeker customers;
- projected milestones related to outreach, recruitment, assessment, training, placement, and retention;
- identification of implementing partners and the "sparkplugs," who can make things happen, and;
- creation of budgets and financial plans.

The types of jobs projects being considered included replicating short-term job readiness programs like Project STRIVE, longer-term intensive training in manufacturing, and new training and "soft skills" curricula.

Managing for Outcomes

In their initial submissions, the six jobs sites set a combined target of 8,000 job placements with 60% 12-month retention for the three-years of capacity building phase. Within a year of launching the jobs projects, five sites revised their estimate downward to

5,000 placements based upon the early learning and experiences that made the new milestones and targets more meaningful. As of March 31, 2000 ninety percent of this target had been achieved.

This three-year period of start up represented a time of prototyping, trial and error, and capacity building. A number of interesting lessons would emerge:

- In two cases, the guiding employment strategies of two local investors failed to achieve the stated targets and had to be redesigned.
- About one-quarter of the 45 jobs projects/prototypes required major redesign and, in some cases, were abandoned outright. The fact that redesign was built into the outcomes framework allowed for open discussion of these often difficult changes.
- Twenty percent of at least 75 organizational partners were dropped because of their inability to meet performance targets for recruitment, assessment, or job placement. Many of these groups were community-based organizations.
- One local investor underwent three organizational designs to connect industry brokers, community-based organizations, and training designers.
- After three years of effort, two local investors redesigned their governance organizations.
- The local investor in a poor, low capacity town had to fight for systems reform as it produced modest results.
- The JI started with an off-the-shelf management information system (MIS) but most local investors redesigned their systems after three years.

A particular challenge for the JI involved performance contracting--between AECF and local investors and between local investors and other implementing

organizations called upon to deliver agreed-upon jobs targets. AECF's contracts with local investors included payment provisions initially related to data quality and quarterly milestone reporting; in later years, AECF imposed small penalties when sites failed to attain stated employment targets. Several local investors wrote excessively narrow (and frequently punitive) performance-based contracts with implementing organizations, in which they only received payments after achieving long-term outcomes. Many of these organizations did not have the resources to experiment with new forms of job retention investments. In some cases, local performance-based contracts also revealed the political nature of local contracting, and sites experienced political backlash when they enforced the contracts or chose not to renew contracts with favored providers. In one case, the pressure exerted by a performance-based contract contributed to data falsification that was caught by the projects auditing process

The Seattle Jobs Initiative Business and Office Occupations Project is a good example of how a project evolved during the three year-capacity development phase. The project began as a collaborative effort with a local commercial temporary service agency. After several months, it became clear that the agency was unable to work with harder-to-employ job seekers, and the firm was dropped. Next, the Seattle staff started their own training program at a local community college modeled on Wildcat in New York's financial services industry. By the end of the capacity-building period, the program was moved to another community college facility and now offered basic skills and English language training, soft skills, office occupations training, case management by community-based organizations, an employment broker who aggressively placed candidates, Saturday tutoring, reunion groups, and self-help groups for men and women.

Local investors had learned that more pre-occupational training and support was needed based on the number of program dropouts and difficulties in placing people. The Seattle office occupations project now has more than 100 placements, a $9.50/hour starting wage, and 65 percent one-year retention in the labor market. And it is still evolving. The target and milestone chart below provides both the projections and actual figures for one full year of implementation:

Milestones	**Projections**	**%**	**Actuals**	**%**
Enroll in program	210		127	
Finish training	168	(80%)	90	(71%)
Placed in Job	134	(79%)	70	(77%)
Retained 3 months	107	(79%)	51	(72%)
Retained 6 months	94	(88%)	44	(86%)
Performance Target	**Projections**	**%**	**Actuals**	**%**
Retained 12 months	87	(92%)	31	(70%)

(Please note that the definition of retention is maintaining an individual in the workforce not necessarily in the first job where they placed.)

The above chart demonstrates the utility of milestones as a management tool. This chart, describing the second fill year of project operation, provides several key insights in projects performance while raising a number of important, albeit vexing questions, for both project managers and Foundation investors, including these:

1. In comparing the percentages of customers progressing through the five milestones (Enroll in program, Finish training, etc.), the ratios between *projections* and *actuals* are quite comparable. For example it was anticipated that 80% of the 210 customers enrolling in the program would hit the "Finish Training" milestone. From a project management standpoint these core assumptions were validated.

2. A key exception is in the percentage of those who reached the"retained 6 months" milestone who were expected to reach the performance target of 12 month retention (87 of 94 or 92%). The actuals for this transition was 31 of 41 or only 70%.
3. The milestone chart also raises a basic and quite troubling question Why is it that the volume of customers progressing in the customer funnel overall is only 50-60% of those anticipated? Is this a program design flaw in terms of the recruitment strategy employed? Or might the issue be more of an environmental one. For example, has the super heated Seattle economy simply reduced the number of job seekers precipitously from previous expectations? Or alternatively, is their something about office occupations that doesn't connect with the interests or expectations of the job seeker population, for example are those looking mostly men?

The National Investor Role

The investor concept emphasized by TRI required the Foundation to become actively engaged with sites. AECF needed to go beyond providing financial resources, to ensuring the development of aggregate learning and intellectual capital, and assisting with on-going management focus. JI local investors displayed such engagement by redesigning jobs projects and creating their own governance and management structures. But how should the national investor be engaged? Should AECF be active in the same way as local investors? Or would this role represent obstructive micro-management.

Although AECF made significant interventions in each of the sites during the capacity-building phase, it generally relied upon other management tools. These included:

- **Models of Behavior**--AECF modeled the behaviors that they required of local sites. Further, JI designers held themselves accountable to targets with the AECF Management Committee and Board of Trustees. JI staff also reached out and met with local boards, funders, and officials to explain the JI, discuss its givens, and give support for local efforts.

- **Milestone Management**--AECF invested in MIS development, data collection, and self-assessment. Training in milestone setting and assessment was provided by TRI. JI designers convened their own self-assessment group.
- **Flexibility**--Local investors developed very different employment strategies and levels of jobs targets based upon their local economies and organizational assets. AECF allowed sites to adjust overall targets after one year and to refine or redesign jobs projects as appropriate.
- **Ownership**--AECF resisted pressure from local investors and consultants to change key givens and assumptions of the JI design because they proved difficult.
- **Incentives**--After the first year of capacity building, AECF included some performance criteria in its site contracts relating to quality data and, later, on achieving job placement targets. AECF withheld payments from a number of sites because of lack of performance. AECF is now developing similar criteria for one-year retention performance.
- **Technical Assistance**--AECF provided TRI and MIS assistance across all sites. AECF provided additional technical assistance when local investors requested it or their lack of outcomes performance warranted intervention. The idea was to reduce site traffic and multiple messages from the national investor.
- **Learning**--AECF convened regular conferences to promote cross-site learning and exposure to best practices and commissioned a variety of technical assistance reports.
- **Management Interventions**--AECF undertook management interventions when sites did not achieve progress related to data and outcomes. AECF suspended payments, disinvested in poorly performing projects, funded executive search firms, sent

management consultants to sites, pushed sites to give up on low-performing partners, identified governance problems, established a variety of management and design conditions in AECF contracts, negotiated for the phase out of a site, and reduced the dollar amount of overall site grants.

Self-Assessment and Learning

AECF understood the need for the Foundation and six sites to develop competencies in self-assessment and learning. The TRI concept of milestone management was seen as central to this effort. The workforce development field has repeatedly demonstrated that effective jobs projects are built up over years of trial and error. The JI--with its emphasis on retention and higher wages--would be no exception. AECF believed that reflecting on its progress and its success in reaching milestones was the best way to encourage project building and to enhance performance. Milestone management would set the stage for continuous improvement in which local investors engaged in a process of rapid re-design and innovation.

Implications and Challenges in Using Outcome Thinking

The TRI outcome methodology corresponded nicely with JI's design and investment assumptions. It helped the JI and its local investors develop a common language of purpose, facilitated a quick start-up, forced recognition of underlying assumptions, helped promote a learning culture, and kept the focus on getting results. The TRI outcomes-approach became most evident in the specific design of jobs projects and their targeted outcomes. In addition, the bias towards results did not get in the way of

innovation; all six sites invented and reinvented projects, products, and workforce services. Local and national investors did experience a range of reactions to the TRI outcome methodology. In some cases, these suggest directions for improvement and rethinking, in other cases they affirm the utility in an outcome approach.

- Some sites found the TRI business language of customers, targets and outcomes difficult to accept. For some, it conflicted with beliefs in human empowerment. Others viewed it as a new national foundation gimmick. Some, however, found that the language actually attracted business partners and gave a sense that the JI was not "business-as-usual" for the non-profit sector.
- Local stakeholders, particularly community-based workforce providers, often regarded the TRI approach warily. One explanation is that sites did not have the time or resources to educate these partners about the methodology and its implications.
- The outcome methodology, and the Jobs Initiative as a whole, assumed some stability in the marketplace so that learning and efficiencies could develop. The last seven years of economic growth and changes in welfare policy, however, have created dramatic changes in the composition of employer and job seeker customers. In effect, the learning needed to be even more rapid and continuous than was anticipated.
- For some community-based providers, the focus on outcomes appeared to be no more than a conventional and judgment-laden evaluation. Local investors, moreover, sometimes were presented with JI evaluators who employed different language and methodologies.
- Several local investors critiqued the TRI methodology as pushing them to short-term interventions that could attain targets rather than to long-term strategies for labor

market change. Some also perceived the TRI approach as too rigid and bureaucratic. Effectively using the outcome approach required major cultural change in organizations, and it was not always an easy transition. For example, the setting of numerical targets early on in the capacity phase that subsequently required revisions caused difficulties for many sites with their boards and local stakeholders. What in the outcome framework is considered learning (recognizing that early assumptions were faulty) presented a public relations and credibility challenge to local investors.

- AECF under-invested in developing models and training for local investor self-assessment. At the same time, local investors probably underestimated the time and energy necessary to build an effective self-assessment capacity in their staff and local partners. Local investors were not ready for full self-assessment until they had achieved results and data collection systems had been built. AECF experienced mixed success with many of the different types of management interventions. In general, JI designers found a combination of customer support and direct intervention around outcomes to be effective. Site diversity, however, made all interventions challenging and limited the effectiveness of cross-site learning strategies. Serious management interventions always ran the risk of being interpreted as prescriptive.
- A constant tension existed between managing for outcomes, innovation, systems change, and capacity building. The JI pursued all four at once with different levels of emphasis during the first three years. These tensions played out differently across the local investors who themselves differed in terms of institutional capacity and labor market strength.

- The outcomes focus was a source of tension between national and local investors and between JI consultants who focused on workforce innovation rather than outcomes. Tensions grew when local investors did not achieve targets.

Towards Changing Workforce Systems

Having completed the three-year capacity building phase, the JI now transitions to a systems reform phase. As of the Fall of 2000, three of the six sites have formally expanded into the development of strategies, projects and prototypes designed to improve the way the workforce system operates in their regions. The remaining three are developing investment plans to be considered by the end of 2000.

Many have assumed that systems reform investments would build upon the learning and credibility of the capacity building work and lead to a greater scale, quality, and sustainability of good employment outcomes for low-income, young adults. But explicitly applying the outcomes framework to workforce systems reform presents unique challenges.

System reform or "getting to scale" is less defined territory than the JI jobs projects of the capacity building phase. Labor markets are complex, private, and involve millions of transactions. Attention has to be paid, for example, to developing effective system reform strategies that build upon site assets and identifying where levers for institutional change exist. Prototypes will be more important for systems change because of the learning that is required. AECF has commissioned Jobs for the Future to produce a planning guide for workforce systems change.

Verifying milestone achievement for systems changes is especially difficult because interim milestones relate to activities and behavioral changes beyond the purview of JI local investors and their MIS data collection systems. That is, changes may occur in company or industry practices or across the board for all community college enrollments. In Seattle, for example, a system reform milestones states: *By March 2003, there will be a comprehensive system of community-based organizations (CBOs) in workforce development that are driven by case management standards and effective retention programs.* Interim milestones to reach this reform milestone include developing and implementing mutually acceptable standards and reflecting upon performance of standards.

The outcome framework applied to the systems reform phase of the JI is a work in progress. It will stretch the capacity of sites to conduct self-assessments and make needed course corrections along the longer road to improved individual-level employment outcomes. In particular, using the outcomes-framework to guide and reflect upon policy and program advocacy will present new challenges because of the constant uncertainties of such work. Undoubtedly, more will be learned about how a focus on outcomes can change public and private workforce systems that under perform for low-skilled, low-income job seekers.

Conclusion

The Jobs Initiative's evolving outcomes story is cause for both optimism and caution. Although the long run evaluation results are not yet in, evidence to date suggests that the JI's outcomes framework significantly aided the six JI local investors in developing and implementing jobs projects and achieving distinctive employment results.

Prospects for achieving similar results during the next phase of workforce systems reform also look promising. But playing the role of national or local investor in workforce outcomes has not been a casual affair. This is the reason for caution. AECF not only had to invest financially in the outcomes framework and the training of its local investors, but it also had to change some of its own behaviors, such as treating its JI local investors as customers. A more diligent pursuit of outcomes may require investors to limit their day-to-day involvement in project management and focus instead on their own role and responsibilities for achieving outcomes. The Jobs Initiative points to many of the challenges that social investors must recognize if they are to use an outcomes-approach to achieve better results.

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